

Speech at the Closure of the Transatlantic Green Platform

By Commissioner Danuta Hübner

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The world is confronted with global challenges such as energy security and climate change with significant predicted impacts on human lives, biodiversity and economic activities that no single country can tackle by itself. We are facing challenges that do not care about borders. I believe that today's initiative to foster transatlantic co-operation on green technologies is one very appropriate way to work together, pulling in the same direction and building on our respective strengths.

The EU institutions, for its part, are actively addressing a range of environmental priority areas for which our citizens express clear concern. For example, the need to halt the biodiversity loss is increasingly pressing as the negative social and economic impacts are already being felt in a various areas and sectors such as agriculture, tourism and a number of industrial sectors.

To cope with the impact of human activity on climate change, the Commission has proposed in January 2008 an ambitious climate change and energy legislative package that is now being discussed with the EU Parliament and Council. And to cope also with the expected effects of climate change the Commission services are preparing an additional proposal to strengthen the adaptation aspects in order to make them more present in our EU policy and investment decisions.

I believe that by providing a stable green regulatory framework, the EU institutions are at the same time sending a concrete signal to the

markets facilitating the development of eco-technologies. I understand that the EU eco-industry - which contributes 2.1% of the EU GDP and 3.4 million jobs - has a significant share of the world market particularly in water and waste management sub-sectors (50%), as well as in the renewable energies sub-sector (40%).

Many of our Member States, regions, local authorities and private sector organisations are moving forward and collaborating to transform Europe into a more efficient, and low carbon economy. The challenges are huge, but so are also the opportunities. The only way to go is together in a coordinated way, all policies and instruments in synergy at the European, national, regional and local levels.

The EU's Cohesion Policy, for which I am responsible, is making a substantial contribution to help Member States and regions achieve these EU policy goals.

The Cohesion policy programmes adopted for the present period 2007-13 aim to stimulate growth and structural change in Europe through a balanced policy mix with two key objectives in mind: promoting sustainable development and competitiveness, in line with the Lisbon agenda.

In particular, when it comes to environmental protection, this component has been built into all the programmes. The contribution of the environment to ensure sustainability, reduce health and other negative environmental costs has been well understood and that has facilitated the greening of many the programmes.

For all these reasons, Cohesion Policy has allocated billion € 104, or 30% of the total budget, to support the environmental revolution in the broad sense. This support includes direct investment in the traditional sub-sectors of water and waste management, air quality

and rehabilitation of contaminated land, as well as indirect investments that also contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation such as sustainable transport, renewable energies and energy efficiency. In these two areas the increase in involvement of EU regional policy is characteristic.

For example, in relation to "green energies" (renewables and efficiency), our policy has allocated for the period 2007-13, for the convergence objective five times more financial resources than in the previous period 2000-06, and for the regional competitiveness and employment objective the increase has been sevenfold.

Certainly, Member States and regions have responded to the opportunity to meet climate change and energy challenges with the Cohesion Policy support by proposing ambitious programmes. For example, France has proposed to screen all its investments for carbon neutrality; the East of England region is pursuing a similar objective by promoting investments in renewable energies and energy efficiency, sustainable housing and particularly by supporting development of eco-technologies. And these are just two of many examples worth mentioning.

Finally, I would like to say that the Commission is promoting the exchange of best practices in the environmental sector through the promotion of a number of schemes (such as the *"Regions for Economic Change"* initiative) that encourage the networking of EU regions and municipalities in the green sector, as well as the *"Regio Stars"* awards that recognise also green excellence achieved at EU level.

Why do I believe that the debate on green technologies in economics and politics is of great importance and that the transatlantic dimension is vital in this context? Because it is for us – the developed

world – to take the lead when it comes to greening the global economy. We need to start at home first, before we can ask others – the emerging economies – to follow.

Of course there are many other issues that would indeed benefit from your in-sights.

- The fundamental question in our dialogue here is: To what extent can the EU regulatory initiative on coping with climate change be paralleled to facilitate the development of a global eco-industry? We could work on this in the Transatlantic European Council.
- But also here in Europe the open question is on how can we involve the EU national and regional authorities in an even better way to give a green spin to our policies? Understanding that going for a green solution does not mean going for a cheap solution - but we should go for the green, not the cheap.
- How can we ensure sustainable public financing for "greening" our policies using at a catalyst for attracting strong private investors? I believe we need a genuine public-private partnership in this area to be both efficient and sustainable.

I thank you for your attention.